United Nations S/2008/172

Security Council

Distr.: General
12 March 2008

Original: English

Letter dated 10 March 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Eritrea to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I wish to take this opportunity to make a few comments on the latest special report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (S/2008/145) dated 3 March 2008.

My delegation finds it regrettable that the overall thrust of the special report misses another valuable opportunity to underscore and tease out the significance of what is at stake for regional peace and security. As has been underlined on various occasions, the fundamental pillars of international law at stake are the sovereignty and territorial integrity of a United Nations member State and the supremacy of the rule of law. Yet, the nine-page special report literally dwells on minor symptoms of the disease without making any serious efforts at diagnosing or finding a cure.

The report blames Eritrea for a number of shortcomings with respect to the situation of United Nations troops in Eritrea. For the sake of brevity, they will not be enumerated in the present letter; please refer, however, to documents S/2008/156 and S/2008/148, which provide Eritrea's views on each of the alleged impediments mentioned in the report. The fact of the matter is that Eritrea had no role in all of the major decisions that affected the status of the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) in Eritrea. As noted in the report, the decision to temporarily relocate UNMEE troops from Eritrea to Ethiopia was done through closed consultation between the Secretary-General and Prime Minister Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia during the African Union summit at the end of January 2008. But Eritrea was kept in the dark about this important decision until the day before the United Nations troops began to cross the border into Ethiopia.

The report also discusses the regrouping of the United Nations troops to the city of Asmara. A movement of armed United Nations troops to the capital obviously has serious security implications. At any rate, force reconfigurations of that magnitude cannot be taken without the knowledge and consent of the host country. And yet no consultations were held between the Secretariat of the United Nations and the relevant Eritrean authorities.

In general, the overall flow of information, when provided, from the United Nations to the relevant authorities in Asmara has been incomplete, sketchy, ill-timed or tardy. Even at this late hour, there is still lack of clear information from the Secretariat to the Government on critical matters that pertain to the future status of UNMEE. The special report should have been cognizant of the importance of Eritrea

08-26939 (E) 130308

to be part of the decision process that affects the status of UNMEE both as a host country of the mission and a concerned party in the matter. In this regard, for decisions on the future of UNMEE it is necessary to hold full and timely consultations with the host country.

The special report also mentions the Secretary-General's preparedness to make available his good offices for the issue at hand. My delegation wishes to caution that any attempt to create alternative mechanisms would be inconsistent with the letter and spirit of the Algiers Agreement. It is important to recall that in its twenty-sixth report, the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission, as appropriately quoted in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2008/40 and Corr.1), affirmed that "the boundary between Ethiopia and Eritrea now automatically stands as demarcated by the boundary points (coordinates) listed in the annex to the Commission's Statement of 27 November 2006, and that it considers this decision as binding on the parties. The Commission further asserted that it 'has fulfilled its mandate ...'".

Finally, my delegation wishes to stress that Eritrea has always treated the United Nations peacekeepers with respect and dignity. The spirit of cooperation and hospitality accorded to the United Nations troops that have come to Eritrea to serve in a peacekeeping operation is something to which the troop-contributing countries can attest.

I would be most grateful if the present letter could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Araya **Desta**
Ambassador and Permanent Representative